

Planning and Zoning Board Joint Meeting with Town Council

05/17/2023 Comments

Background: My name is Duane Gorgas. I have resided on South Palm Ave in Howey since 1983 in a residence built in 1926 by W. J. Howey. In 1988, I became a volunteer member of the Comprehensive Plan committee for Howey's first Comprehensive Plan. In 1989, I was elected to Town Council serving from 1989-2000 during which time I was Mayor Pro-Tem for 2 years (1991-1993) and Mayor for 7 years (1993-2020). I worked with the Town Council to approve the first Comprehensive Plan in 2010. As such, I have direct knowledge of the thought process behind the plan's development and the original intent of how future developments in the Town were intended to be managed. As a longtime resident on South Palm Ave and a person who walks Palm Ave daily, I also have firsthand knowledge of the daily impact traffic has on this roadway.

Comments: I have reviewed the documents posted on the Town website for this meeting and wish to provide the following comments:

I can agree that development is inevitable. However, development must always consider the benefits that all residents (old and new) would derive from development and whether or not those benefits outweigh the changes required to lifestyle from such development. The original intent of the Comprehensive Plan was to provide guidelines and rules for development that would maintain the residential character of the Town over larger development of smaller housing units with limited amenities and large commercial development that could result in negative lifestyle impacts. Every citizen survey conducted over the years since 1989 has identified as the primary reason residents choose Howey as their home is that "Howey is a safe, quiet, residentially oriented community". In my opinion, all development requests should focus on how the proposed development would maintain that goal. Growth for growth's sake alone does not meet that goal. So, any development request has to focus on the details that lot size, house size, and commercial development have on the social interaction lifestyle changes each resident would experience from this development and how those changes will or will not maintain Howey as a primarily residential based community. Additionally, the services required to support the development have to be in place concurrent

to the development (not after) so the impact on existing residents is minimized. Ideally, future planning should anticipate development impacts on necessary services with those services being IN PLACE prior to the development impact. Obviously, new developments must pay upfront to provide the necessary services (water, sewer, transportation, storm water, electrical, communication, etc) to offset the impact the new development will have on the quality of life of ALL residents of the Town.

I will address three service issues that new development impacts the most.

Water: Current plans for water capacity expansion appear to be in line to support new developments as they occur.

Sewer: Current plans to expand the sewer capacity including operation of a Town owned sewage treatment facility appear to be in line to support new developments as they occur. What is lacking is a defined detailed plan on how to retrofit existing septic systems in Howey. While separate from new development, it is reasonable to assume the Town will seek to eliminate all septic systems in the future. The cost for that unfortunately will be borne by existing septic system users (like myself) and the cost should be passed on as fairly as possible.

Transportation: There appears to be a poorly organized vision and plan for how to manage the transportation impacts of new development. There is one significant problem area. The Palm Ave (SR19) corridor is designated as a “constrained facility” as stated in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan as amended in 2020. The text is below:

“FDOT requests that local governments identify constrained roadways in their Comprehensive Plans to ensure maintenance of the operating conditions, so that significant degradation in the level-of-service does not occur. A constrained roadway is one in which adding more through lanes to meet current or future needs is not possible due to physical, environmental or policy barriers.”

“SR 19 is a constrained facility through the Howey-in-the-Hills historical town center. The road is not only physically constrained by current development; it would also create irreversible harm to the Town’s historic downtown character to create a four-lane corridor. The majority of traffic on SR 19 in Howey-in-the-Hills is through traffic. Because of the constraints placed by all the lakes in the region, SR 19 is one of the few direct routes to get from South Lake County to North Lake County. The Town has

explored a three-lane section design for SR 19 through the downtown area and ultimately rejected this design solution.”

The current 5 yr. Future Capital Expense plan for transportation improvements presented to Council at the 01/23/23 meeting makes no mention of any significant short term or long-term plans for future improvements to Palm Ave (SR 19) and/or alternate traffic routing to adequately mitigate the stated “physically constrained” designation in the Transportation element for Palm Ave (SR19). Why? The Town should be actively looking 5, 10, 15, 20 years ahead at the impact developments will have on the transportation LOS for the Town with a plan that includes alternate routes for through and local traffic. Alternative routes should be explored to redirect through traffic in the Town to minimize increased LOS over these time periods. The addition of “feeder/collector/arterial” roads within the 2 developments in final approval do not substantially mitigate the impact on North Palm Ave (SR 19) from Central to the CR 48/SR 19 intersection. While southbound traffic towards the Turnpike and beyond from these developments would redirect traffic from Palm Ave (SR 19) and potentially redirect some northbound traffic to Leesburg and beyond via #2 RD, the northbound traffic to Tavares and beyond would still add LOS to North Palm Ave (SR 19) at Central and Palm. How does this solution improve/maintain LOS for this area of a “physically constrained” roadway designation? I would maintain that area would be even more congested than now due to the increased traffic from these developments. Also, the Citrus plant truck traffic which turns at Central and Palm is not addressed in any future transportation plans. This intersection was never designed or ever improved since 1983 to allow truck traffic to turn safely without encroaching on the opposite lane of traffic or ROW. The number of trucks using this intersection daily already cause Palm Ave traffic to slow and even stop frequently. Even a stop light will not address the turning radius trucks require to safely turn in this intersection unless the intersection is redesigned. Unfortunately, a redesign may be physically and financially impossible. What will the impact be if Central (#2 RD) has increased northbound traffic from these developments? Parking is limited now in this area and more traffic may impede/restrict the ability to park and exit this area due to the increased flow of vehicles.

Prior to 2000 the Town Council conducted a referendum to designate S Florida Ave as a truck route for traffic from/to the Citrus Plant via south SR 19 at the intersection of SR 19 and South Florida Ave. South Florida Ave at that time was

being improved and was design upgraded to support truck traffic including water line improvements and relocation of a power pole at Central (#2 RD) and South Florida Ave to allow trucks to safely turn onto South Florida Ave. The funding was shared with a grant and the cost to the Town was reasonable at the time. The council at that time supported the proposal and would have approved it. I asked the Council to allow the residents to vote on the referendum as the change impacted all residents. However, a small vocal group of residents on S Florida Ave (<10 residences at the time) used misleading statements regarding the funding sources to convince the residents to defeat this proposal. Had this been approved at least one half of truck traffic currently turning at Central and Palm would have been eliminated. Now 20+ years later, all the residents bear the impact this truck traffic has on Palm Ave (SR 19). Therefore, it is imperative that truck traffic to the Citrus plant be included in any future transportation LOS evaluations for Palm (SR 19).

Recommendations: I would make the following recommendations to Planning and Zoning, Development Review, and Town Council members regarding future development approvals.

1. **Conduct another resident survey** regarding future development including a response to the question “Why did you choose Howey for your home?” This survey can be easily developed using past survey questions updated as required. The survey can be done using an online survey tool like Survey Monkey or other suitable applications. Notification to residents should be limited to those residents who pay water bills since they are the true residents of Howey whose opinion is valued. The results would then indicate the current opinion residents have on how future development should be managed within the Comprehensive Plan.
2. **Obtain an updated LOS transportation evaluation for Palm (SR 19)** that would include detailed break outs of “through traffic” (traffic that come from South of Revels Road and from CR48/Palm (SR 19) intersection) including a break out of the number of trucks, a break out of the number of trucks turning at Central (#2RD) and Palm (SR 19) that are expected to visit the Citrus Plant, and the projected traffic from the 2 developments that would use Central (#2RD) to access North Palm (SR 19) to travel to Tavares and beyond. This updated data can then be used to project future LOS demands

Palm (SR 19) would experience and how much future development would contribute to the LOS. This study would also provide information on the impact an alternate route would have on future LOS for Palm (SR 19).

3. **Develop options for an alternate route for through traffic (Howey By Pass) to redirect north/south bound traffic from Tavares and beyond as much as possible from Palm (SR 19)** which would minimize future LOS increases from developments and increased through traffic. The only available route will geographically be limited to west of Taylor Cemetery, current Town limits, current approved developments, the Citrus plant, Mission Inn, and Los Colinas. The alternate route would possibly start at Revels Road west of these areas and proceed north and connect to CR 48. This alternate route would be designated as a “truck route” to prevent through truck traffic from using Palm (SR19) as a route and effectively redirect Citrus plant truck traffic from Palm (SR 19) to #2 RD. Additionally, explore using the CR 455/SR 19 intersections south of Howey and in Tavares to encourage north/south bound traffic from Tavares and beyond to use this route through Astatula to bypass Howey entirely. The CR 455 alternate will be difficult to implement and may not be viable but should still be proposed. This alternate route concept (Howey By Pass) will not be easily accomplished because of the coordination required between the Town, local impacted property owners, Lake County, and FDOT. Funding will also be problematic. **However, the only long-term solution for Palm (SR 19) as a “physically constrained” transportation route is an alternate route.** Future development would be expected to contribute a “fair share” to the cost of the alternate route.
4. **Establish a road impact fee for Howey.** I noted a comment somewhere that Howey currently does not have a road impact fee structure. Why? This is an effective way to have new development pay for their share of contribution to the transportation needs within the Town.
5. **Conscientiously review and apply the established development goals from the Town resident survey each time a development request is submitted** so the quality-of-life impact from new development will be maintained for all residents (old and new). This will require a fair unbiased assessment each time of the affect new development will have on the life style of every Howey resident. Consideration should be made in this process of the culminative affect multiple developments will have.